

Giving in order to receive

New Gifts for the Holidays for Shoppers – and Sellers

It's the time of year when all the shiny new technology comes out as corporations seek to lure customers to hand over their carefully-budgeted holiday cash. While there's no insanely great product introduced this year in electronics, there have been new ventures and upgrades across the board. But if consumers somehow feel more like products themselves this season, there are reasons for that, too.

Windows – literally digital

With **touch screens** being adopted across the entire personal computer market, everything seems to be now geared toward the original digit – your index finger. Once more following Apple, Microsoft's **Windows 8** system redesign of all their interfaces to be more touch-friendly and long awaited Surface tablet are bold steps forward.

Surface is the software giant's first general purpose computer hardware product. Basically the Surface is a tablet that can transform itself into a laptop. It's the same weight and price as the iPad but a little larger. Other attractive features include twice the memory, a kickstand, ports, and two kinds of optional keyboards. On the downside there's a short battery life and it only uses Wi-fi connections.

Its **RT** operating system is a smaller version of Windows 8, itself a radical departure from Windows' previous look. It's brighter, using colored tiles rather than icons, and things like the familiar Start button in the corner are gone. Instead it's done largely with finger swipes and pokes.

The device itself has had good reviews, most criticisms surprisingly pick on the software. For instance, Surface requires all new apps available only through the Windows Store, but there aren't many yet. Nor is this initial version able to run any of Windows native programs. The reviews of the new OS have been mixed – people either love it or hate it, partly because it's largely just a glossy new skin covering the same old layout. But versions of the system are intended to run on *all* of Microsoft's devices, PCs, tablets, and phones at least until the next system comes out.

People who want 8 now can buy new machines or easily get an upgrade for Windows 7. The hard part may be getting used to it. Avoiding Windows 8 is even simpler. Microsoft has announced they'll be providing support for Windows 7 until 2020, so you've got plenty of time to decide your next course of action.

Apples and oranges

Microsoft's not the only company trying out new things. Google is coming out with a sleek new laptop, the **Chromebook**, for only \$249. It is able to be so cheap because it doesn't need much power as it's intended to closely integrate with Google's cloud of online services.

Like its inexpensive tablet, the \$199 **Nexus 7**, the strategy behind this seems to be to be both about getting into the hardware end and using new users in these categories to extend its advertising base. Amazon uses much the same strategy with its better-reviewed **Kindle Fire** for \$149.

Market dominant Apple has also released a new product, the **iPad Mini** for \$329. If the iPad is hardback-sized, this smaller version resembles a paperback, but that seems to be the main difference between them, and it's still a little larger than the Fire or Nexus 7 tablets. Unlike the Surface with its detachable keyboards, however, these are ereaders more aimed at consuming media rather than work.

Apple remains as proprietary and closed as ever. They got some bad publicity when the newest **iPhone's** maps feature, designed to take on Google's, failed badly, and an executive lost his job for refusing to apologize. Other bad news: if your iPad battery dies, they'll sell you a new iPad (minus your personal data) for \$100. Apple will service a dead iPhone, but it too will come back dataless – and possibly with an upgrade that will require all new apps.

Continued on back



Continued from front

Smartphone security

Cellphones will present other problems in the future, too. The sheer information gathering and processing power of these new gadgets makes smartphone viruses even more dangerous than what we've been used to. **Malware** already exists that can listen for spoken credit card numbers or detect them when typed. Experiments recently conducted by the Naval Warfare Center were able to install spyware using the Android's built-in camera to steal visual information and even build virtual 3D maps.

There's no doubt that as information technology moves to the cloud for convenient access everywhere, whole new classes of viruses and means to fight them will become necessary. Though there's not much you can do about it at the moment, there are a few things you can do to make your smartphone more private by limiting data you share.

Because if you have a smartphone, your phone company acts as its ISP. Which means they can track your Net usage, like search history and websites visited, along with data including your location as well, and sell it to advertisers.


For ATT&T and Verizon you must actively opt out, and in the case of the latter it must be within 30 days of purchase. ATT&T doesn't have a time limit nor sells the data, just uses it to sell you new products and services. The other two major carriers, Sprint and T-Mobile, also collect some data for in-house use, but also allow opting out.

None of these providers seem to be aggressively using the information they collect, and it's not at all certain just what it all includes. But opting out now might provide a hedge should they begin doing so. You may have to search as forms or numbers to call are buried in their websites. In any case, the companies cannot legally sell personally identifiable information, just access to categories of data.

Corporate stocking stuffers

It's not just telecommunication companies that are sitting on mountains of data just waiting to be turned into cash. The major online players are all giving themselves presents this year. But not all information has the same value to advertisers. Facebook may know who your friends are, and Google tracks every site that you visit, but Amazon knows what you *buy* online – and that is a true gold mine.

Amazon's done little so far with all the data they've collected, but with all the **top-level domains** they're trying to get, they are poised to become *the* place to look for stuff online. But the other place to look, Google, is already reaping the benefits of its recent unifying of user accounts. It used to be that you needed to visit a merchant's site before ads from that retailer would trail you around. Now you don't even need to visit, a search is all that's required.

Credit card companies are also gathering user data to sell. Just in time for the holidays, **MasterCard** has packaged its transaction data, claiming to advertisers that it can target last-minute shoppers, holiday travelers, Black Friday shoppers, even those who eat out only on holidays. So enjoy your spending this season, because you will be giving to more people than you can ever know. 



Introducing SnackReads Bite-size Entertainment

Southwest Cyberport is proud to be a full-service ISP and aspire to be even more. We've recently opened adjacent office space as **Ideas And Coffee**, a coworking facility that's a friendly alternative to coffee shops for quiet online work or meeting clients and colleagues.


And now, SWCP's getting into the online publishing business with **SnackReads** (www.snackreads.com).

As longtime readers of genre fiction, many staff members have greatly enjoyed shorter works as well as novels. But with the decline of magazines and anthologies, short pieces are getting shafted. They're becoming harder to find even as ereaders and tablets create more opportunities for enjoying them than ever before. So when Josh Gentry, one of our talented network administrators and now director of the project, came up with the idea of **SnackReads**, we jumped at the opportunity.

SnackReads are short, enjoyable tales that are perfect for unwinding after a long day or while waiting for an appointment, during breaks, riding the RailRunner, etc. They're quick, easy fun that won't keep you up at night, and inexpensive, too - less than \$2 each. All come in several convenient formats without DRM: once you buy it, it's yours.

Our goal is not just to help readers but writers, too. There are many great once-published stories now gathering dust in their files that deserve a second chance. So we're hoping to uncover some real gems.

We've started off strong with a great **space-opera** story by Albuquerque's own **Suzy McKee Charnas** featuring a talking cat. We hope to quickly follow this up with several gripping **steampunk** tales by recent Hugo Award nominee and (we're quite proud to say) our own former Tech Support Director, **Daniel Abraham**. Gorgeous original cover art for these have been created by a very talented local artist and teacher, Jennifer Gentry.

Other brief quality works of fiction, some free, will be added as they become available. Please check out **SnackReads** at www.snackreads.com and let us know what you think. You have nothing to lose but your boredom. 



Southwest Cyberport

New Mexico's Expert Internet Service Provider since 1994

505-243-SWCP (7927) • SWCP.com • Help@swcp.com

5021 Indian School NE, Suite 600, Albuquerque, NM 87110

Portal editor/chief writer, Jay Nelson jnelson@swcp.com